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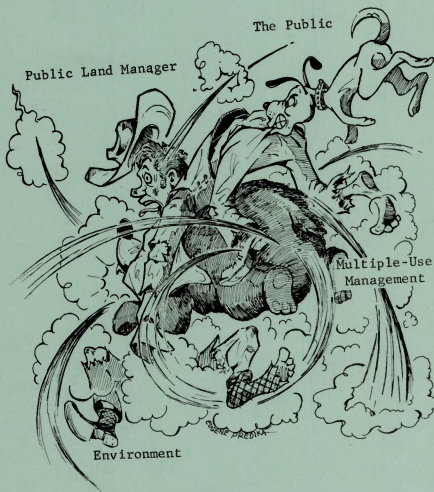
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Land Use Planning
 for the
 RED LODGE
 UNIT
 BILLINGS B.L.M. DISTRICT

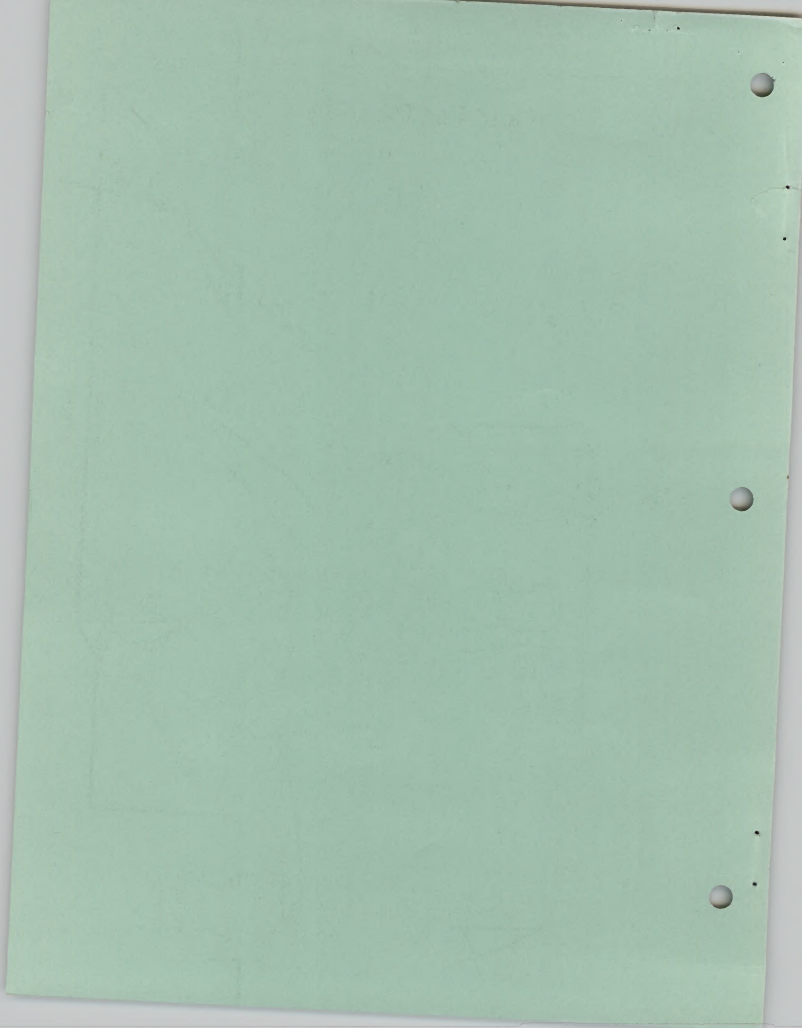


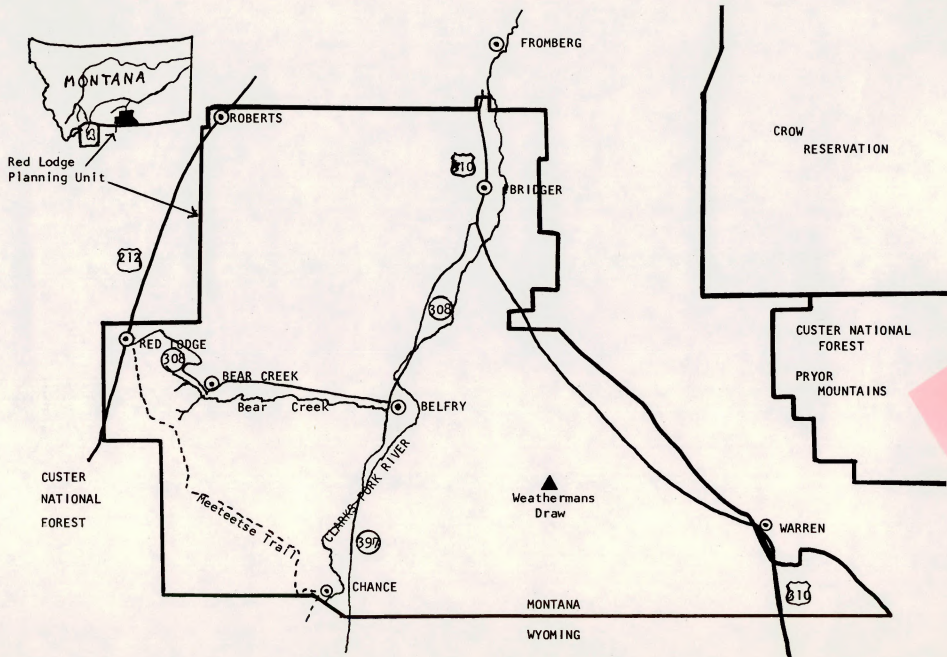
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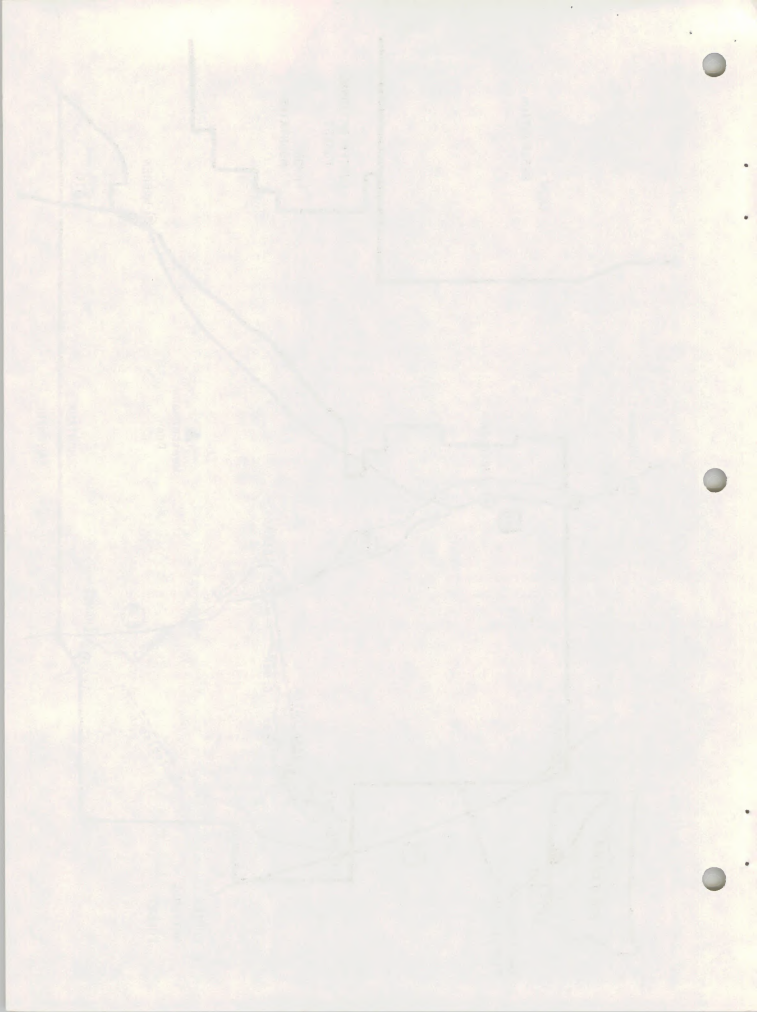
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Land Use Planning

Red Lodge Planning Unit

Introduction:

The purpose of this brochure is to help involve you in land use planning for the public lands in the Red Lodge Unit. We want your ideas and suggestions to help make the land use decisions.

Meetings will be held to acquaint you with the specific resource relationships and conflicts. Within the Planning Unit we are considering all natural resources and their uses.

The purpose of our Land Use Planning is to provide orderly use of the public lands. The system is based on inventories of the resources and their uses, as well as their economic and social needs. Then land use conflicts are identified and recommendations are developed for resolving the conflicts. All this has been done and we now solicit your suggestions and ideas for further refinement or alteration.

Physical Description:

The Red Lodge Unit is located in the southwest portion of Carbon County, Montana.

Elevation ranges from 3,600 feet near Bridger to 5,555 feet at Red Lodge. Precipitation varies from six inches near Belfry to twelve inches at Bridger and twenty inches at Red Lodge. A variety of vegetation grows in the Planning Unit. Salt sage occurs in the southwest and southeast portion of the Unit, while big sagebrush-bunchgrass occurs over the remainder of the Planning Unit. A small stand of Douglas-fir grows on the relatively moist north slopes of Mount Maurice near Red Lodge. Cottonwood and willows grow along Grove Creek, Ruby Creek, Bear Creek, Cottonwood Creek and the Clarks Fork River. Juniper occupies the higher slopes and rocky ridges throughout the Unit.

Relationship of Public Lands to Local Economy:

The population in the Red Lodge Unit is largely rural. During the past ten years (1960-1970) the population has declined 15 percent in Carbon County. Projections indicate Carbon County will continue to experience a population decline through the 1970's.

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY EUGENE PREDIKA

There are six communities in or near the Unit:

Red Lodge (County Seat)	1844	-	population	1970	census
Bear Creek	31	-	"	"	"
Belfry	250	-	"	"	"
Bridger	717	-	"	"	"
Fromberg	364	-	"	"	"
Roberts	300	-	"	"	"

The primary sources of employment are agriculture, oil and gas, minerals, and business related to recreational activities.

Carbon County is the second highest county in Montana in current mineral production, as well as distribution of Federal mineral leasing receipts back to the State (by law 37½% of receipts are returned to State for redistribution to the counties). The Red Lodge Unit has the vast majority of the current mineral leasing and production in Carbon County.

<u>Land Ownership</u>	<u>Surface Acres</u>	<u>Sub-surface Acres</u>
Private	220,003	167,003
State	14,509	14,509
Public (Administered by BLM)	114,221	167,221
Total	348,733	348,733

Mineral Resources:

Elk Basin Oil Field, discovered in 1915, is the oldest producing field in the Unit and one of the oldest in the region.

The Planning Unit has two other producing fields: Frannie Oil Field, and Dry Creek Gas Field.

Other minerals in the Unit are bentonite and coal. Coal exists over a large area from Bear Creek and Red Lodge north and northeast to Bridger and Fromberg. Bentonite is found in the high ridges east of U. S. Highway 310 from Bridger southeast to Warren and the State Line. Bentonite is currently being strip-mined in the Warren area. Claims have been staked on most of the known bentonite deposits.

History:

The Clarks Fork River flows through the Unit. The Clarks Fork River named for Captain Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1803-1805) has historic significance. It provided a route for Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce's attempt to escape the U. S. Army. "Beaver Men" or Mountain Men were guided to and from the Yellowstone Park area and Yellowstone River by the Clarks Fork River. Tom Fitzpatrick, Jim Bridger, Captain Bonneville were some of the Mountain Men who hunted, trapped and camped on or near the Clarks Fork River.

The historic "Old Meeteetse Trail" traverses the southwest portion of the Unit from Red Lodge to Chance near the Montana-Wyoming State Line, and then continues south to Meeteetse, Wyoming.

The pioneer settlement began in the 1880's. The early settlement occurred primarily along the river and creek bottoms. The growth of the towns of Bear Creek, Washoe and Red Lodge was heavily influenced by coal mining. String Town, later renamed Bridger, got rolling when the railroad reached the Clarks Fork valley around the turn of the century.

Recreation

U. S. and State Highways 310, 212, 308, and 397 connect the Red Lodge Unit with Yellowstone and Teton National Parks and the Custer National Forest. The Unit provides historical, archaeological, scenic and a variety of other recreational attractions.

Winter sports such as skiing and snowmobiling are popular in the Red Lodge area. Big game and upland game bird hunting occurs throughout the Unit. Deer hunting accounts for 1415 visitor days use annually. Hunter success between 1960 and 1970 averaged 65 percent.

Scenic areas near Red Lodge, Bridger, Weathermans Draw and the Clarks Fork River have excellent potential for recreation site development.

Wildlife

Mule deer, elk, antelope, whitetail deer, sage grouse, chukar partridge and Hungarian partridge are the principal game species in the Unit. Other species found in the Unit include bobcat, an occasional mountain lion, black bear, coyotes, rabbits, skunk, red fox, muskrat, beaver, and raccoon. Ducks and geese use the Clarks Fork River. The river is also fished for trout primarily above Belfry and for whitefish from Bear Creek north. A variety of hawks, small song birds, golden eagles, bald eagles and an occasional falcon have been observed in the Planning Unit.

Livestock Grazing

Approximately 2,500 cattle and 6,200 sheep are presently grazed by 39 ranchers on the public lands in the Unit.

Watershed

Most of the Unit (96%) drains northerly into the Clarks Fork River which is a tributary of the Yellowstone River (Missouri River Basin). The balance (4%) drains southeasterly into the Shoshone River (also Missouri River Basin). Significant factors which have adversely affected the production of clean useable water from these watersheds include season long livestock grazing, oil and gas extraction, and bentonite strip mining.

Issues

The following pages highlight the major issues we have identified.

A recommended course of action is presented for each issue.

Our recommendations are based on information currently available. What are your recommendations?

We ask for additional information and views on these issues as well as any that we may have overlooked.

Based on additional information presented to us, we will reconsider all recommendations before the land use planning decisions are made.

Issue 1

Harvesting timber and woodland products.

Opposing Points of View:

There is some local demand for posts, poles, firewood and Christmas trees. On the other hand, any loss or removal from the sparse stands can be detrimental to wildlife habitat, watershed and scenic values.

Recommendation:

Do not harvest any timber and woodland products.

Issue 2

Season long livestock grazing within important wildlife habitat and watershed areas.

Opposing Points of View:

Season long grazing has adverse impacts upon all types of habitat and watersheds. However, these areas are customarily grazed season long for livestock production.

Recommendation:

In the areas identified for intensive grazing management, work cooperatively with the ranchers to develop rest-rotation grazing systems which fully consider the wildlife habitat, watershed, and livestock production needs.

In the balance of the Red Lodge Unit, give low priority to grazing management in favor of high priority for the areas identified for intensive grazing management.

Issue 3

Eradication of sagebrush.

Opposing Points of View:

Eradication can be detrimental to scenic values, archaeological sites, wildlife habitat and in some instances to watershed. However, eradication of sagebrush increases forage production for livestock use and occasionally improves watershed conditions.

Recommendation:

In the areas identified for intensive grazing management, apply 3 full cycles of rest-rotation grazing management to see if the desired plant composition can be achieved through natural plant succession before any consideration is given to sagebrush eradication.

In the balance of the Red Lodge Unit consider ranchers requests for sagebrush eradication through private funding on a case by case evaluation of environmental, wildlife habitat and watershed relationships.

Issue 4

Control of predators by appropriate State and Federal agencies on lands administered by the BLM.

Opposing Points of View:

There are advantages to allowing predatory mammals and birds to thrive in ecological harmony. However, predators sometimes kill livestock causing economic losses.

Recommendation:

Authorize State and Federal agencies to control predators pursuant to a written request to the BLM, and only where control can be justified. Control measures practiced will be as selective as possible for specific animals doing damage.

Issue 5

Implementation of grazing systems in areas subject to bentonite strip mining.

Opposing Points of View:

Strip mining could disrupt livestock operations and destroy grazing management facilities. However, grazing systems are essential for rehabilitating strip mined areas by improving vegetative reproduction which in turn improves watersheds, wildlife habitat, scenery and livestock forage.

Recommendations:

Implement grazing systems which embrace strip minable areas, but do not build fences or watering facilities, or apply land treatments on strippable sites except when protective easements can be acquired from owners of unpatented mining claims and private land.

Issue 6

Strip mining in and around recreation sites, archaeological sites, and scenic areas.

Opposing Points of View:

Strip mining can detract from or destroy scenic qualities along and adjacent to travel routes, recreation sites and archaeological sites. On the other hand, there is a growing national need for bentonite for various industrial uses.

Recommendations:

Highway 310 scenic corridor - take all steps legally possible to reclaim the strip mined lands to serve as a reclamation demonstration area along the highway.

Weathermans Draw Recreation Complex and the Excellent Scenic Zone - withdraw the areas from mineral entry and clear mining claims that have no mineral value.

Dry Creek, Belfry, and Clarks Fork fishing access recreation sites - classify under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act to prevent mineral entry as an interim protective measure pending firm determination of extent and nature of public need for recreation development.

Balance of the Red Lodge Unit - take all steps legally possible to reclaim strip mined lands and access roads in a manner which serves the interest of quality environment.

Issue 7

Oil and gas operations within important and critical wildlife habitat areas.

Opposing Points of View:

Oil and gas operations can adversely affect important and critical wildlife habitat. However, there is a national need for oil and gas production as an energy source.

Recommendations:

Allow oil and gas leasing and extraction only after an environmental analysis has been made on the areas designated as important and critical habitats. The most important areas are west of the Clarks Fork River and between Dry Creek and the State Line, and the Polecat Bench area.

Issue 8

Oil and gas operations on or near recreation sites, archaeological sites, and scenic areas.

Opposing Points of View:

Oil extraction facilities detract from or destroy scenic values, and other forms of recreation. On the other hand, there is a national need for oil and gas production as an energy source.

Recommendations:

"Excellent" scenic zone and Meeteetse Trail Scenic Corridor - do not allow any further oil and gas leases, and do not reissue existing leases when reissuance is discretionary with BLM. To the extent legally possible, apply stipulations to the existing leases which will protect and enhance the scenic and other recreational values. If in the future it is determined that the Meeteetse Scenic Corridor (outside of Excellent Zone) contains critical oil and gas reserves, reconsideration will be given to that area through the use of extraction techniques which minimize environmental degradation such as off-site drilling.

Dry Creek, Belfry, and Clarks Fork fishing access and recreation sites, and the Weathermans Draw Recreation Complex - to the extent legally possible, prohibit oil and gas extraction facilities within view of the three recreation sites and within the Weathermans Draw Recreation Complex.

Balance of the Red Lodge Planning Unit - to the extent legally possible, apply stipulations to the oil and gas leases and exploration permits which serve the interest of quality environment.

Issue 9

Chemical and accelerated sediment pollution of the Clarks Fork River resulting from oil and gas operations.

Opposing Points of View:

To stop such pollution will be costly to the oil companies. On the other hand, the resulting pollution is detrimental to the fishery, wildlife, livestock, and scenic values of the Clarks Fork River as well as values further downstream.

Recommendation:

Stop all chemical and accelerated sediment pollution. The measures necessary include recycling of all waste waters, removal and cleanup of all check dams used for oil sumps, establishing environmentally sound techniques to dispose of chemical residues off site, and reclamation of roads, pipelines, and drilling and storage sites.

Issue 10

Prescribed burning and control of wildfires.

Opposing Points of View:

Fires can increase forage production for livestock as well as improve wildlife habitat and watershed conditions. However, fires can endanger private property, reduce the current year's forage supply, and they are sometimes detrimental to the vegetation and soil.

Recommendation:

Control all wild fires pending completion of studies to determine the effect of fires on different vegetation and at different times of year. Structure the studies to obtain conclusions on when and where wildfires should be allowed to burn; and when and where prescribed burning would be beneficial.

Issue 11

Development of recreation facilities on the Old Meeteetse Trail.

Opposing Points of View:

Development of such facilities will increase visitor use which will create complications for private land owners. However, the Old Meeteetse Trail possesses significant scenic and historic values; and Carbon County claims it as a public road.

Recommendation:

Proceed with orderly development with the objective of re-establishing the Old Meeteetse Trail as a scenic and historic American heritage landmark trail.

Issue 12

Development of public access to the potential recreation site in Weathermans Draw.

Opposing Points of View:

Development of roads would tend to accelerate erosion in the area already affected by moderate erosion. However, this area offers recreational opportunity, in terms of scenic and archaeological values which merit some type of public access.

Recommendation:

Develop foottrail access rather than a road.

Issue 13

Off-road vehicle use.

Opposing Points of View:

Off-road vehicle use can cause erosion, disturbance to livestock, damage to wildlife food and cover, and damage to facilities such as fences. However, there is a demand for off-road vehicle use by snowmobiles, motorcycles, four wheel drive and dune buggy vehicles.

Recommendations:

Weathermans Draw Recreation Complex - restrict all off-road vehicle use.

Excellent Scenic Zone and Old Meeteetse Trail Scenic Corridor - restrict all off-road vehicle use except snowmobiles.

Balance of Red Lodge Unit - do not restrict off-road vehicle use.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Billings District Office
P. O. Box 2020
Billings, Montana 59103

May 1, 1972

Dear Reader:

I want to thank you for reading this brochure. I hope you have time to attend one of the public hearings scheduled for 7:30 p.m., May 31, in the High School cafeteria, Red Lodge; or 7:30 p.m., June 1 in the City Hall, Bridger. If sufficient interest is generated, an additional hearing will be scheduled in Billings.

You are also invited to make your comments to us in person or in writing anytime from now until June 15, 1972, at the Billings District Office, P. O. Box 2020, Billings, Montana.

One point I want to stress is that this will not be the "only chance" to participate in our Land Use Decision-making. Land Use Planning will be a process of constantly reconsidering the changing needs and interests of our society as they relate to public lands.

This is your land, and we here at BLM are seeking your involvement to help make Land Use Decisions which will fully consider the potential of all resources.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,

C. Rex Cleary
District Manager



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BILLINGS DISTRICT OFFICE
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Billings, Montana 59103

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